

ARAB SPRING

WHAT'S NEXT?

PROTESTS HAVE ROCKED THE MIDDLE EAST ALL YEAR.
WHAT DO ITS PEOPLE WANT, AND WILL THEY SUCCEED?



FAST FACTS

"ARAB SPRING": The term was first used in 2005 to reflect hopes that the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq would encourage democracy in the Middle East. In 2011, the term became associated with spontaneous homegrown revolts against longtime Arab rulers.

ARAB SPRING COUNTRIES: 11*

POPULATION UNDER AGE 15 (AVERAGE): 31% [U.S., 20%]

AVERAGE TERM OF RULERS: 21 years. Muammar el-Qaddafi of Libya held the record, 42 years. [U.S. Presidents can be elected to a maximum of two 4-year terms.]

*Countries with major and minor protests: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen.

SOURCES: The Economist, Population Reference Bureau

Words to Know

- **authoritarian** (*adj.*): demanding blind submission to a ruler or government
- **rebel** (*n.*): one who resists, often by force, the authority of the government
- **regime** (*n.*): a government that holds power

In Libya, after months of bitter fighting, **rebels** have finally succeeded in ousting longtime ruler Muammar el-Qaddafi. In Syria, President Bashar al-Assad has used both the army and the navy to attack demonstrators in an effort to crush a growing protest movement.

In Egypt, a largely peaceful revolution toppled the government of **authoritarian** President Hosni Mubarak in February. But some Egyptians are frustrated by the slow pace of change and are taking to the streets once more.

In Yemen, protests against the government have made an unstable country even more dangerous. The U.S. is concerned about the growing influence of a branch of Al Qaeda, the Islamic terrorist group behind the September 11, 2001, attacks.

It all began last December, when a 26-year-old fruit vendor in Tunisia set himself on fire in protest after being mistreated by police. News of the incident spread quickly on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media, and Tunisia's cities rose up in protest. Within a month, President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali was forced from office.

Suddenly, it seemed, protests against repressive governments

began to spring up in Arab countries across the Middle East and North Africa (*see map, pp. 14-15*). Now, 10 months after the start of what has become known as the Arab Spring, the region remains in a state of upheaval.

Winds of Change

In Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, where longtime rulers were overthrown, it's still unclear what kinds of governments will take their place. Other authoritarian **regimes**, like Syria's, are digging in or unleashing deadly crackdowns on protesters.

For much of the rest of the world, including the U.S., the turmoil has been a big surprise. There is little tradition of democracy in the Middle East. It has long been taken for granted that strongmen would continue to rule for decades without being challenged. Now, it seems, the Arab people are no longer resigned to being governed against their will.

"Arab politics has been fundamentally altered in a way that's irreversible," says Robert Danin of the Council on Foreign Relations. "The Arab people now have a voice in their own politics."

Unrest is also hitting countries

continued on p. 12 →

A demonstrator in Yemen holds a sign in Arabic that reads: "The people demand the revolution to be decisive."

VIDEO
ARAB
SPRING



الشَّعْبُ يُرِيدُ
الْحُكْمَ الثَّوْرِيَّ الْآنَ



The deposed President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, at his trial in Cairo

Damaged by protesters, a giant wooden portrait of Libyan dictator Muammar el-Qaddafi lies on the street in Tripoli.

where repression is less obvious but leaders have refused to hand over or share power. Some governments, like Morocco's, are introducing democratic reforms.

Others are trying to head off protests before they start. Consider Saudi Arabia. The world's largest oil exporter—and a key U.S. ally—is spending \$130 billion to boost salaries. At the same time, its government has tightened censorship of the Internet and print media, and has put more police on the street to snuff out small demonstrations.

Mubarak on Trial

Despite all the uncertainty, one recent event was a powerful symbol of change.

In August, former Egyptian President Mubarak was wheeled into a courtroom in Cairo, the capital, on a hospital bed and placed in a cage. He is on trial for corruption and for ordering a crackdown that led

to the killing of protesters during Egypt's revolution in February. It's the first time an authoritarian Arab ruler has been put on trial by his own people.

Some observers say that the spectacle of this trial will cause

are high for its embattled President. Assad has lost the support of other Middle East leaders, and the West has been almost unanimous in its condemnation of his crackdown.

"For the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President

“That word — *hope*. Previous generations, our fathers' generation, we didn't have that.”

other leaders, like President Assad of Syria, to resist change even more fiercely. But many Egyptians say that Arabs should take the opposite lesson.

"All of the Arab world has to know that any leader who makes his people suffer will face this fate," says Fathi Farouk, a pharmacist. "From today, history will never be the same."

Meanwhile, in Syria, the stakes

Assad to step aside," President Barack Obama said last month.

"Works in Progress"

What does the Arab Spring mean for the U.S.? The upheaval in Syria presents an opportunity, says Elliott Abrams of the Council on Foreign Relations, "because it's a hostile country. If that government falls, it really changes the Middle East and is a huge



A boy carries a homemade sign at a protest in the Syrian city of Banias.

Is this cartoonist optimistic or pessimistic about events in the Arab world?

gain for moderation in the region."

But in countries like Egypt, long a key American ally, the outcome is more uncertain. There, the U.S. faces the prospect of a less friendly government, or even Islamist radicals, coming to power, as they did in Iran in 1979.

The U.S. has largely stayed on the sidelines militarily during the Arab Spring. The exception is in Libya, where the Obama administration is backing rebels by taking part in NATO air strikes against the Qaddafi regime. The U.S. has also spoken out sharply against the Syrian crackdown.

It could be a long time before the changes brought about by the Arab Spring become clear, says Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"When you have upheavals of this kind—driven by so many deep economic and political factors—the consequences tend to play out over decades, not months," he says.

One thing is clear to Cordesman: Despite all the talk about demo-



cracy, "none of these countries are going to rapidly become us."

Lara El Gibaly, an Egyptian college student, agrees. "We must decide what kind of government will work best for Egypt," she tells *JS*. "Democracy and freedom of expression in Egypt are very much works in progress."

But as Nasseem Tarawnah, a young Internet entrepreneur in Jordan, told *The New York Times*: "That word—*hope*. Previous



generations, our fathers' generation, we didn't have that."

—Patricia Smith

Think About It

1. How and where did the Arab Spring begin?
2. What are some outcomes—positive and negative—that could result from political protests in the Arab world?